United Nations E/CN.5/2019/NGO/15

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 October 2018

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Fifty-seventh session
11–21 February 2019
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies

Statement submitted by International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-17788 (E) 091118

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Statement

The International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, strongly advocates for policies and programs that support the rights and choices of all older people to be protected, respected and free of discrimination. Unfortunately, many older persons continue to experience inequality of opportunity. This is at least in part due to ageism, which is pervasive throughout all levels of society, resulting in social exclusion of older persons.

The 2018 Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons highlights the numerous ways in which older persons experience social exclusion as well as how social exclusion impacts older peoples' access to basic human rights including social protection and income security. The 2018 Sustainable Development Goals Report indicated that, although 68 percent of older persons received a pension, the typical amount provided is insufficient for prevention of living in poverty. Similarly, Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.4, seeks to increase the development of skills for employability but makes no reference to older people accessing such opportunities. As well, Goal 10 targets focus income inequality while other forms of discrimination, including age-based discrimination, are absent.

Health status should not be a barrier to income security, nor income status a barrier to healthy ageing. The most recent Global Monitoring Report on Tracking Universal Health Coverage released by the World Health Organization in 2017 indicated that coverage of essential health services varies widely between and within countries. As increased age is often associated with increased likelihood of having chronic comorbidities and thus increased healthcare utilization, older persons are more likely to face financial barriers to maintaining their health including the potential of 'financial catastrophe' due to extensive amounts of out-of-pocket spending. This is particularly true if universal health coverage is unavailable or inadequate for the needs of older persons.

Inequality Among Older Persons

As described by the WHO's World report on ageing and health released in 2015, older people are a diverse heterogeneous population with unique experiences influenced through the physical and social environments that affect opportunities, decisions and behaviours throughout the life course. These experiences contribute to overall cumulative advantages or disadvantages including health outcomes. Some subpopulations of older persons experience additional layers of discrimination, which leads to even greater inequalities in access to programs, policies and services. These factors include income status, employment history, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, functional ability, health status, geographic location, among other factors varying by cultural and political contexts.

Recommendations

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report on Preventing Ageing Unequally, published in 2017, provided policy recommendations to address these inequalities which emphasize the use of a life course approach by (1) preventing inequalities before the accumulate across the life course, (2) mitigating entrenched inequalities, and (3) coping with inequality at older ages. The undersigned call upon the Commission for Social Development to ask Member States to:

- Disaggregate data on social protection by age to inform implementation of social protection measures across each stage of life and thus help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty;

- Increase coverage of pension plans to include those who are self-employed or are employed informally;
- Prevent people from experiencing age-based discrimination in employment through the adoption and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and promoting social campaigns that aim to combat ageism across all areas of life including the workforce;
- Implement and/or support programmes such as vocational training, networking initiatives, job search assistance, and lifelong learning specifically for people who experience barriers to long-term, gainful employment, including older persons;
- Expand universal health coverage to include services that help people maintain their health as they age, such as comprehensive assessments, care planning, assistive devices, and physical rehabilitation and provide financial supports to increase affordability of home care, long-term care, and informal caregiving.

The International Federation on Ageing thanks the Commission for the opportunity to advocate for the improved inclusion of older persons in society through improved social protection policies and welcomes opportunities to collaborate on relevant projects.